

ONE LITTLE CANDLE

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SAFARI

1

From tall, dry grass, yellow eyes glowering,
Sinewy muscles rippling beneath spotted skin
Too late, the antelope lifts her head in alarm,
turns in flight.
And the leopard seeks a resting place, gorged on flesh
still warm.

2

In the wind, a tree sways with unnatural weight.
 Their pale hands caressing deadly metal, each part carefully
 examined,
 Tense muscles under drab khaki.
 The clearing is scanned again and again.

3

Snarling, the big cat crouches on trembling haunches,
Yellow eyes flashing hate
Across the distant veld,
Through red skys, dark forms circle, waiting.
Their pale hands prod the flesh still warm.

Sandra Mains Russ
Contest Winner
Secular Poetry

THE WIND

I don't guess anyone will ever know what happened to him, because I don't think anyone believes anything happened to him. It's a rather complicated story but I'll try to explain it to ya.

Ya see, "Old Lee" was part of the family, not just my family or your family, but everybody's family. Yes, "Old Lee" was a father to everybody and a brother to many. Now if you were a'talking to anybody about "Old Lee," all you'd have to say would be "Old Lee" and they'd know who you were a'talking about, and if'n you were ever a'talking to him in person you'd just say "Lee." For ya see, he was just that kind of feller. Everybody wanted him for a father or brother, so nobody was ever formal, even if they wanted to be.

Of course "Old Lee" had outlived almost everybody, but was just as sane as anybody in the world, and just as sturdy too. An if'n there were any old timers in town that were sane enough to remember his last name, they never mentioned it. I think they realized what a mental let down it would have on the town if they knew. Yes, he was the kind of feller you'd never forget, and you would even go out of your way just to shout hallo to him.

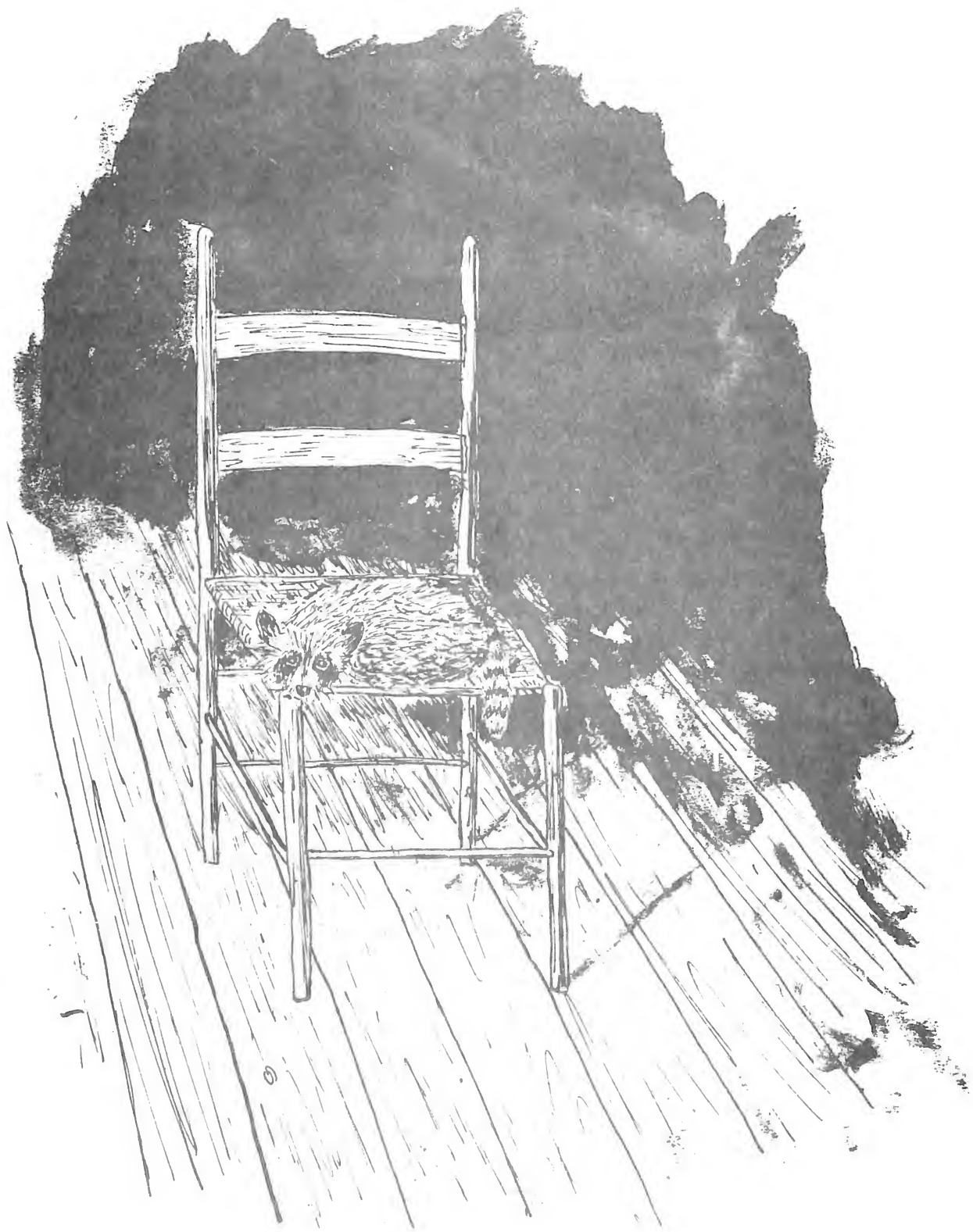
I remember seeing him come into town every day, his snow white hair would be just a'bobbin in perfect time with his stride; a stride so healthy not many teenagers could match it. He'd come into town every day at one o'clock precisely, never early, never late. Some of the men in town would come out to their front porch every day about that time for their after dinner smoke, and would sit there till "Old Lee" passed. He'd always wave, give a hearty, "Hallo, Mr. Jones," (or whatever the name was), flash a cheery smile, and be off to town.

He was always welcome and his credit good no matter where he went. He never would accept nuthin' free though. Many a time he would turn down dinner invitations with a "No, marm, it'd be too much trouble fer ya."

He did jobs fer anyone that wanted anything done. If people paid him, O.K. . . . and if people couldn't afford to pay, O.K., he did it for free. He was just that kind of man.

When he wasn't doing odd jobs, he'd be sitting in front of the general store, telling stories to the children. He'd always have a crowd. Seems like the children would even follow him around whenever they could. When "Old Lee" finally settled down to tell a story, you never in your life seen such attentive young'uns. They'd set there on the ground with their legs crossed and leaning forward, so as not to miss a single word. I don't believe that they were more attentive to their own fathers than they were to "Old Lee." One of the amazing things about him was that he never told the same story twice, or if'n he did they were so fer apart that nobody remembered it. He'd tell all different kinds of stories too. Most of them about animals, you know, birds and squirrels and the like. However, sometimes he'd talk about the Good Lord. Not, mind you, the way the church talked about it, but he talked so the children understood. He made it so the children paid attention instead of going to sleep. Sometimes an adult would even get involved in one of his stories, whether he wanted to or not.

Now "Old Lee" lived about two miles out of town. Not too many people have been there outside the parson, who has to go to everybody's house. You would be always welcome in his house, no matter who or what you are. I say that cause he dearly loved animals.



His house was very rustic and simple. It sat in the middle of a beautiful wooded glen, and had a small stream running beside it. He had dug a well, which was fairly deep, in front of the house, and everyone who visited him said he had the best water in the county. His house was very plain inside. It just had a bed, a table and chair, an old wood stove, and a sink. Of course he had a little more than that but the rest isn't really worth mentioning.

Any money he made went toward food for him and his animals, and if he had any left over he'd give it to the needy. He'd just say, "I got jest what I wants and don't need no mo, let/nother body use what I don't. No need lettin it waste."

I believe the animals thought of him as a brother too. There wasn't an animal in the forest that was afraid of him. The deer would drink from the stream, squirrels would scamper in and out of the house, and a raccoon usually slept in his chair. He also had five or six dogs. It was plain he loved the animals.

You couldn't find a more religious person either. Oh, he never came into town to church, no sir! However, everyday about eight o'clock he'd come outside, sit on the edge of the well, and read the Bible out loud. Some people even say the animals gathered round his feet to listen, but you can believe as much of that as you want.

Every morning he'd be up early, wash and shave, eat a good breakfast, then feed the animals. (Of course, as I've already said, he reads the Bible.) If'n he finished early, he'd up and hike through the woods.

But just like a clock, every day, rain or shine, he'd come walkin into town at precisely one o'clock. He'd make the children happy and help where help was needed. He tol' the parson sumpin' the day that he visited him that he'll never forget. "Old Lee" said, "Sir, you nor nobody else can know what life is about til yer outside and look inside. Then wen ya can look and see all the confusion and trouble all round ya, and still not be troubled, then ya understand life." The poor parson sat for days trying to get the true meaning of this.

Then one day it happened. He didn't come. Men got up off their porches and peered down the road, pipe in hand. The children looked wearily at each other, reading eyes. People began to talk. By one-thirty some men had got together to go to his house. Now ordinarily there wouldn't have been any commotion, but this was "Old Lee", a man who was never late. Nobody in town could remember when Lee had missed a day, and as far as anyone knew, he had never been sick in his life.

Well, to make a long story short, they never found him. His cabin was empty, the raccoon was in his chair and the squirrels were there, but "Old Lee" wasn't. They searched the woods, dredged the well, and did just about everything. It was truly a sad day. Then during one last look around the house one of the men picked up a book. It was old and faded, and the pages were yellow. The searcher opened it to the title page and read the yellow dimmed words,

THE HOLY BIBLE.

He gently closed the book and started to lay it down again when a piece of paper slipped out from between two pages somewhere in the book. The paper was carefully unfolded and read. The handwriting was crude and very hard to read, but it said essentially:

I talk to the wind
And my words are all carried away.
I talk to the wind
And God whispers my way.
I talk to the wind
And it may hear what I say,
But if I do the right things
I shall be carried away.

Robert Cribb
Contest Winner
Short Story



THE SPEECH OF THE DEAD

Words said by the dead
Touched my mind
Like light fingers on a keyboard,
And I marveled at the sound
That was not spoken.

Across 100 miles
I heard Buddy tell me,
"It's all right, Jo Jo,
It's all right,"
He must have meant
That after death
There is . . .

Barbara Rhodes
Contest Winner
Religious Poetry

AND YET WE GO ON

CHARACTERS

Lieutenant McAlister—Strong set man of about 24 years of age.

Private Hopf—Medium set man of about 25 years of age

Chi—Short dark-headed girl, (Vietnamese characteristics).

Mao en Lou—Man short in stature, (Vietnamese characteristics).

SET

Central hut with door on stage right of hut. In the center an old torn dingy curtain. Behind it is a cot. Above the cot is a small window. Shelves on stage left wall. Bodies seem to be lying around outside the shack. Also appearance of other shacks in the background, destroyed and smoldering.

PROPS

A table on the left forestage of the hut. A chair behind it. Under the table a small oil lamp. On the shelves is a couple of books and a roll of cloth.

(The curtain is on rings so as to slide back easily. The rings should not be too noticeable.)

LIGHTS

The lights through the entire play should slowly be fading. When the lamp is lit in the hut, the lights should come up in the hut. Lights should fade on the outside of the hut until the very end when the Private says his last lines. Lights dim when the Private snuffs out the Lamp.

TIME

The time elapsed in this play is about 4-5 hours.

(Lieutenant and Private enter stage left. The Lieutenant signals for the Private to check out the rest of the area. Lieutenant McAlister now enters center shack cautiously and proceeds to check out the hut. In a few seconds he notices the curtain in the center rear and pulls it back.)

CHI

(She screams as she covers her child's body on the cot.)

No!

LIEUTENANT

Sh-h-h, Lai Dae!

(Chi sobs in low wimper. The Lieutenant looks out through the rear window behind cot. The Private starts to walk up the steps. The Lieutenant falls to his knees and points his rifle at the doorway.)

Hopf!

PRIVATE

Yeh, Lieutenant.

(Vague stare on his face.)

LIEUTENANT

All I found were these two. A couple of unfortunates.

(Lieutenant looks at the Private questionably.)

PRIVATE

Lieutenant our guns didn't just flatten a Goug outpost. We just annihilated—a village.

LIEUTENANT

You're crazy, Private! The South Vietnamese left this village weeks ago.

PRIVATE

You tell them that. Intelligence was wrong.—Lieutenant, there were no V.C. here. Those bodies out there—are old men, women and kids. Children blown to bits—

PRIVATE

I'm not leaving here, and—

(Starts to walk towards the table.)

I'm bettin' you won't either.

(Private reaches under the table and pulls out lamp. Lieutenant walks down steps and stops at the bottom. The Private lights the lamp and walks over to the cot.)

PRIVATE

Oh Lieutenant,—don't stand around out there too long. You're a sittin' duck.

(Lieutenant quickly turns around and comes back in the hut. Private is looking at the child. Lays rifle down. Chi reluctantly moves from over her child's body.)

LIEUTENANT

I wonder what happened to Nao. He should have been here by now.

PRIVATE

He's probably connivin' with the Cong right now.

LIEUTENANT

You got him pegged wrong, Private.

PRIVATE

You're a poor judge of character too. None of us are perfect in everything we do but you're battin' a thousand.

(Private starts to touch the child.)

CHI

No—touch.

PRIVATE

You speak English?

CHI

Yes, a little.

PRIVATE

(Private smiles)

Lieutenant, he's caught some shrapnel.—Let's see, I'll need some type of material for a bandage.

(Lieutenant searches shack.)

How did all this happen?

CHI

I not know. We—told—to leave village one or two day ago.

(Lieutenant brings cloth and Private begins to bandage the child.)

We told, Yankees destroy village. We not believe them.

Then—today.

(She cries.)

PRIVATE

Who was them?

CHI

Cong!

PRIVATE

We were told by intelligence that this camp was a North stronghold. I'm sorry, I truly am.

(Chi turns and sobs, Private takes bandage from Lieutenant and starts to bandage the boy.)

Why he have—more stripes.

(Chi indicates sleeve.)

PRIVATE

He cheated his way into bein' a Lieutenant, my leader.

CHI

But you—you better man.

PRIVATE

That's what they call luck, I guess.

CHI

Luck?

PRIVATE

It's something that follows you around and makes everything turn out, either all right or all wrong.

CHI

(Chi looks at him questionably)

I am not good in English.

PRIVATE

You don't speak bad at all. Where did you learn?

CHI

I learn from father. He went school in Saigon. He now,—was leader of village.

PRIVATE

Is he—

CHI

(Nods in reply.)

Are not all dead here. His body—outside door.

(She looks away from him.)

We live here for two year now. Father—called here to help villagers. They need help in many way. We come they have not food but for rice; they have no thought of being clean.

(She stands and walks to the door.)

Father work with them many hour. Some day he come in and not eat because he is tired.—After year they give him a little money. He was happy—to see people here become—healthy.

PRIVATE

What did your husband do?

CHI

He help father work. He shot by Cong. They tell him stop telling people of America. He not stop.

(She returns to the cot.)

One day I want—go America. My husband speak of land where people sleep and not worry if they will live another day.

PRIVATE

No country is completely free of that feeling.

CHI

What country like? I mean, what it look like?

PRIVATE

Well, let's see—

(Looks off.)

Where I live there are many green valleys. When you look down on these valleys, there are tiny winding roads and small towns. During the Fall the trees turn colors and the valleys turn into a beautiful flowing rainbow. Then in Winter it snows and the valleys look like mounds of cotton. In the cities many miles away—the buildings reach for the sky, always just an inch or two short, but in the country it's so peaceful and calm.

CHI

Father want go there. He thought to go—at end of work

(Chi bows her head. Private takes her chin and turns her face to his.)

PRIVATE

You're quite a girl. How do you hold back the tears in your heart?

CHI

Buddhist not worry, at sorrow. If one has pure moral, then he feel—no sorrow.

PRIVATE

Can you say truthfully, that you do not feel sorrow now.

CHI

(She looks at the Private and then begins to cry as he puts her head on his shoulder.)

I very weak, Yankee.

PRIVATE

The name is Duke. What is yours?

CHI

Chi.

PRIVATE

Chi,—that's a sweet name.

(He turns and looks at the child.)

It looks like your kid is gonna make it. I'm no doctor but he seems to be a strong boy.

CHI

(Dries the tears from her face.)

His name Ton Mou, he seven year old. He hurt when he try to help his grandfather. Father caught most of bomb.

PRIVATE

He is a very brave young man.

(Private stands and walks over to Lieutenant.)

When and if Nao comes we'll be able to leave.

CHI

Nao?

LIEUTENANT

You've doctored the child, Private. Now let's get out.

PRIVATE

You know, Lieutenant, I've a mind to send you to Hell before your time. You're scared slap to death we'll be caught here by the V.C.

LIEUTENANT

Private, I—

PRIVATE

(Looks at him square in the face.)

You what?

LIEUTENANT

(Lieutenant stares back, then speaks.)

All right, Private. We'll wait till morning. If Nao hasn't come, though, we're leavin'.

PRIVATE

That's all I ask.

LIEUTENANT

(He turns towards the door.)

It's getting dark, Private. Maybe we'd better set up a watch. If you'll station yourself outside, somewhere close to the shack.

PRIVATE

Hey, that's a good idea, Lieutenant. One more command like that and you'll have made two sensible commands today.

(Walks over to the cot where he has laid his rifle down and picks it up. Looks at child.)

Lieutenant, leave her alone.

(Private goes to corner of hut outside and sits down. The Lieutenant lights up a cigarette as he sits down in the chair.)

LIEUTENANT

You like the Private don't you.

(She turns and looks away from him.)

You like him 'cause he helped you. Well listen, doll, you'd better be glad I didn't make him leave a while back.

(Lieutenant walks over to Chi.)

You know. You're not a bad lookin' girl.

CHI

Why Duke hate you?

LIEUTENANT

I guess because I have more stripes.

(He turns and kneels beside her.)

You've no reason to hate me, though. You know, it's been a good while since I've seen a really tough look'in girl like you. How about givin' a deprived soldier a little pick-me-up.

CHI

(She looks at him questionably. He turns her head forcefully and tries to kiss her. Chi then yells.)

No, no. No—No.

(The Private runs in on that and throws the Lieutenant down. Then takes his rifle and aims it at the Lieutenant intending to shoot him.)

LIEUTENANT

Go ahead, Private. Or are you chicken?

PRIVATE

(Private slowly lowers rifle.)

No, that's too easy. I want to see you squirm for your last breath—like a fish washed ashore.

(Private walks to door and leans against the entrance way. The hate is still burning in his eyes as Chi walks over to him.)

CHI

He tell—me reason you hate him, because he is—your su—perior.

PRIVATE

Oh, did he? Did he tell you how he ordered an attack on a house in a village we were interrogating,—killing three of his own soldiers. Did he tell you about the fear that rules his life?

LIEUTENANT

What are you talking about?

PRIVATE

The only reason you ordered that attack was 'cause you were scared. Like you are right now.

(Turns to Chi.)

LIEUTENANT

(Turns and answers proudly.)

Maybe that's why I'm a Lieutenant and you're a Private.

PRIVATE

(Private looks at him for a second. Then looks at Chi.)

Just ask him how he treats women—like, like dirt. Ask him about the women he's known or—or the young girl in Saigon. I'll say this much for him. If the devil's got a top ten list, then brother he's got to be at the top.

(Notices something out the window and slowly walks to the table.)

Lieutenant, would you help me over here? **Lieutenant!** It's urgent.

(Private motions to the window and says slowly.)

OOKla out the indowwa. Ongca.

(look out the window. Cong.)

(Lieutenant looks at the Private. He motions to him to circle around the hut to catch whoever is at the window. Private walks to door and lights a cigarette then slowly slips out to the back.)

PRIVATE

It's Nao.

LIEUTENANT

We'll be able to leave, now that our scout is here. I don't know about the kid though. If we want to get out of here you'll have to leave him.

(Private and Nao have now entered the doorway.)

CHI

You cannot help my son?

(Lieutenant shakes his head "no". Chi looks up now and sees Nao as he enters the door.)

No, Noooo.

PRIVATE

What is it?

CHI

He is one who tell us leave. He is Cong.

(Nao looks at them questioningly.)

PRIVATE

I knew it.

(Private grabs Nao.)

NAO

What is this all about? I don't understand.

PRIVATE

Oh, you understand all right. Lieutenant—

LIEUTENANT

(Raises his rifle at the Private.)

Put your rifle down.

PRIVATE

Come on man, we haven't the time.

LIEUTENANT

Drop it, I said.

PRIVATE

(Private drops his rifle.)

I knew you were crazy. I knew it.

LIEUTENANT

Well now you can add another thing to your list of hate toward me. I'm taking leave as of now. Permanently.

LIEUTENANT

I'm a deserter.

(Lieutenant pulls his knife, and cuts Nao loose.)

Here Nao. I guess it's curtains for you and Chi, Private.

PRIVATE

You're more unpredictable than a woman. So maybe this is a stupid question, but why are you deserting?

LIEUTENANT

I received information at the base that this village was occupied only partially by the Cong because civilians had been spotted here. Don't you understand. It was worth a few extra lives to win here.

PRIVATE

Innocent people? You talk about there Vietnamese as if they were nothing more than statistics.

LIEUTENANT

They're just Vietnamese.

PRIVATE

Vietnamese, Chinese, Americanese—what's the difference. So we look a little different. So we talk a little different, we're all Humans,—All one people under one God.

(Stares at the Lieutenant.)

Why did you just even tell us that anyway. No one else would have known.

LIEUTENANT

Oh, but you see the Colonel knew as well. I informed him that that report was a hoax. So you see I can't go back, and you can't either.

PRIVATE

(Private stands.)

I change my mind Lieutenant. You are a statue.

(The Lieutenant aims his rifle to shoot the Private. Nao grabs him from behind and Lieutenant falls to the floor, as Nao takes his rifle.)

PRIVATE

If you're not the—

(Private starts to turn to Chi.)

Then Chi—

CHI

(Chi quickly picking up a rifle.)

Yes, I am one.

PRIVATE

(Private walks slowly to her. He stops with the barrel pointed in his stomach.)

You did this?

CHI

I did not—do it.

(Chi begins to cry.)

PRIVATE

You were the cause of this God forsaken bloody atrocity. Why?—All those things you said.

(Private slowly takes the rifle out of her hand. She falls to her knees and cries.)

How could you make up those things and tell them with such a casual and free conscience? How?

CHI

All is true—

PRIVATE

What?

CHI

—Every word. It was not in this village my family lived and—died.

(She stands and turns from him.)

I did have father who came to help people of village and he looked up to Americans. My husband also looked up to Americans. All took place, that is why I was able to act so well.

(Chi turns back to him.)

The village was My Lai.

(Private turns to Nao.)

NAO

But the other side has committed atrocities also.

CHI

Yes but I only know about my family and My Lai.

PRIVATE

That's what's wrong with the whole damn world. How does this affect me? What am I gettin' out of this? Me, Me, Me! You're as wrong committing this atrocity as the Americans were at My Lai.

CHI

But I did not think Americans would destroy whole village or—

PRIVATE

It doesn't matter what you thought or what you're thinking. The worst atrocity in history—is history.

(Private turns and lowers his head. Nao gets a rope and ties up

Chi. Suddenly the Private looks up at the cot at the rear of the hut.)
Did you know him?—Surely you must have.

CHI

I had son at "My Lai" who is—like him. While I check dead, I find him.

PRIVATE

Checking the dead?

CHI

Cong send me find out how many were died.

PRIVATE

How was your son killed?

CHI

He friends playing in rice fields when Yankee soldier come through. They decide to play war and get behind rice paddy. Yankees saw them—when boys all jump up—they all shot. It just—game.

PRIVATE

And was this your idea of a game?

(Chi looks at him intently.)

LIEUTENANT

(Motions outside door.)

Hopf! I hear someone.

(Lieutenant scurries over to Private and hides behind him.)

PRIVATE

Lieutenant! What the—

(Private turns around and looks at Lieutenant. Shots are fired through the hut, it interrupts his speech. They all hit the floor except for Lieutenant.)

Get down!

(Private pulls down Lieutenant. The Private crawls over to the lamp and puts it out.)

CHI

It is Cong!

PRIVATE

(Private crawls to the door.)

How many are there?

CHI

(Chi just turns away slowly.)

If you not let me go—they kill you.

(More shots come whizzing through hut.)

LIEUTENANT

(Lieutenant jumps up.)

Captain let me go. I did it! I did it!

PRIVATE

(Private looks at him questionably)

Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT

I did it Captain. I was the one. It wasn't—

PRIVATE

(Private cuts him off.)

We ain't got time for your sickening humor.

(He picks up his rifle and throws it to him.)

LIEUTENANT

(Lieutenant continues.)

—It wasn't Sargeant Hopf. I did it. Please don't shoot, Captain!

PRIVATE

(Deciding to go along with the Lieutenant.)

How's that Soldier?

LIEUTENANT

I changed Sargeant Hopf's orders.

PRIVATE

You did what?

LIEUTENANT

Yes, Captain, I changed his orders so our battalion could get all the glory. That's why Sargeant Hopf ordered his troops back. He wasn't retreating.

PRIVATE

(Forgetting about the V.C. outside the stands to look him square in the face.)

Then he was telling the truth at the rail, Sargeant, wasn't he!

(Chi starts sliding slowly towards the door.)

LIEUTENANT

Yes, Captain, I—I couldn't take it any longer. I can't sleep or eat or anything without the memory assaulting my mind of all those men dying. My entire battalion, wiped out. Oh—

(He falls to his knees. Chi jumps up and runs outside.)

CHI

Da Da Muck!

(She is shot by the V.C. and Private runs to the door.)

PRIVATE

Window!

(Points Nao to window. Nao crawls to the window.)

NAO

Oh, no!

PRIVATE

What is it?

NAO

(Bending down over the boy.)

The kid's been hit.

(He feel the boys vulse.)

He's dead.

(Private stares a second then he points to the window with his rifle. They nod at each other. The Private shoots his rifle out the door then rolls out of the way, as Nao jumps up with his rifle out the window. The V.C. shots back at the door and Nao returns fire. The Private looks over at Nao. Nao looks back and nods. Nao walks over to the Lieutenant, still kneeling on the floor.)

PRIVATE

Take it easy on him! He's out of it!

(Nao helps the Lieutenant, with a blank stare on his face, to his feet. Nao picks up his rifle and throws it over his shoulder. Nao now helps the Lieutenant out the door. At the foot of the steps he turns and looks back at the Private. The Private looks about, moves towards center of hut as all lights fade except for light on him.)

Man—made in the image of God. Does this—And Yet—We Go On.

(Lights go out quickly.)

(Sound effects could be used at the end if desired. Syncopated drums could be used effectively.)

Ron Zedick
Contest Winner
Play



HAIKU AND VARIATION

To the Fog

Stockinged haze ahead:
But thickest and at your worst
before we reach you.

For Wartime

Hello, Samurai—
So haikus replaced your sword?
Vietnam calls you.

Betty S. Cox

I feel the mingling of your mind
and the sedate smile flowing from the depths of your being. I sense the
quiet solitude you instill in both our entities by only a glance.
And after a union of our eyes, we touch, remembering. . .

Richard Ward

QUIET COLD

Rain sifts through
disrobed trees
settling on the bushes below

Fog slides under
the sky—
drinking up
houses—

Crickets mutter
of the cold.

Carolyn Santanella

I race through the wind
Like a madman in a hurry
Without a goal or destination
But I must keep moving

There is no place to stop,
And as I look ahead
There seems no place to go
But I move on aimlessly.

No one knows where I shall arrive
And no one seems to care.
The path I make is erased with the wind
And no one will remember where I have been.

Ernest Blankenship

HAIKU

A red, still sunset
Then a flashing sparkle . . .
Venus, the evening star!

Expectant squirrels
Watch the coveted nuts drop
Straight into the drain

Charlsie Griffin

MORNING SCENE AT ROYSTER MEMORIAL

Three frail, old ladies in worn, blue corduroy robes
return from x-ray
in a light drizzle,
trailing another in a wheelchair.

99/100 into life, and 1/1000 interested;
oblivious to weather and world;
they tilt no ear, lift no brow, at a blaring horns;
and no hems sway from sudden sighting
of the phalanx overhead pointed to Brazil.

They hover over her in the chair,
manifesting their one superiority. Finally,
they reach their other home, where,
long past pleasantries with staff at the door,
they slipper into dark.

No matter. Fathers wait. These, too,
will be **beclypte** in,
new-shod, new-mantled,
and someone will kill a fatted calf.

Betty S. Cox

gas station

a prehistoric dinosaur poses friendly,
attracting metal maggots from the road;
with lidless eyes, they cross a slice of night
to suck the baccine of the dripping pump

poised, reposed in its rubber holster like a gun.
Along the walls machines lie in a slump—
their bellies full of cigarettes and sighs
and angry levers who give birth to gum,

chocolate candy in a paper guise.
eager towels scan the windshield's brow,
rods are dropped into an oily throat
made ready for the turnpike's onyx prow—
lumbering dark sought out by amber eyes.

then painted parasites with gas-filled groins
again turn smiling grilles into the night,
and, full and purring, lull themselves to sleep
with promises of pavement, easy flight.

Anna Wooten

HAIKU

Dark clouds—
Rumble and roar,
Chased by bucking bolts

Snowflakes appear
Barren trees
Frame the windows of the world

Becky Sigmon

THE BLACK PEARL

Rare as the earth
Is rare, different
From the others.
Perceiving, not knowing-
Not knowing, caring-
The difference.

Beauty
In the night, inseparable
From the night—breeding
Desire with beauty, desiring
Beauty above desire.

Love
Is the black pearl
Seeking a meaning
Beyond itself. Seeking
Love beyond meaning.

An ace of spades,
A bridge table, a
Tiffany setting reflecting
Purple light—beauty bred
In oblivion, unaware
Of sameness of the night.

Barbara Bridges

Bumble bee
lights upon
fresh clover
drinking
nectar from
its core

Wind shifts
dead leaves
under green
trees

Springtime
illusions—

Carolyn Santanella

SNAILS

realization.

Though only a part of your imagination,
if that is what you sought . . .
Peanuts for the monkey; bees for the honey,
You know that they aren't bought.

Polly, we're all dreamers, chasing high-flown streamers
so long, long ago lost
Poor man, rich man, sitting on his snail,
With millions of nothing in his pockets to sell.

With his crystal eyes, deceiving for the lies,
more than likely he will tell
Ask him for a bit of it, so that you may see the fit . . .
Watch him spur his snail.

Pockets of nothing he has sold;
My love, where is your gold?

Michael Rigsby

A SITE IN THE NATIONAL CEMETERY, WILMINGTON

The oak is large. It spreads itself in
rich containment,
drapes its Spanish moss
above the dead,
and is nearly as serene

Like Hopkins' dove, it shades and warms
the brood,
Permitting cover, filtering sun,
Responding to the breeze,
Upright in large, not-quite-still life;

Reaches to tall benefaction,
While the saints who all that time
went marching in
Applaud the leaf
and smile at cavities.

Betty S. Cox

A TRILOGY

The Morning

A scent of woodsmoke parches the throat
Leaving it raw and burned
Yet cooled with the next gasp of crispy air.

Against the stark blue canopy
A kalidscope of brown, yellow, red, and rust
Merge into a splotched pattern.

A field stands mute yet straw-manured ditches
Reek with damp earth smell
Giving testimony to another life not quite in step.

Bacon, ham, and eggs fill the air
With a warm, greasy smell of breakfast and
The primeval mood is broken by the flash of
Neon lights in a cluttered window.

The Afternoon

Gusting first cold and then stopping hot
A cutting wind creases the skin
Burning eyes and lips.

Rolling down the sidewalk
Underneath the scrutiny of a debating squirrel
Acorns plop with uncertain rythm.

Slender poplars sway and snap to attention
Saluting with gold and silver hands
The fleecy sentinels above.

A fluttering leaf skips and hops
Along its spiky edges and then is sucked
Flat against the face of a lonely tombstone.

And the sun glares down from an azure sky
On a browned green with a silver spike
Stretching from the center and
Old Glory flapping free.

The Night

A dark smell of night and cold drape one in its cloak
And the scurrying of orphan leaves causes
Travelers to whirl back on the unknown assailants
Whistles and whispers of the crafty wind
Play tricks with ear and eye
First a child, and then a cat.
A whistling wind swooshes through the bell tower
Swinging the metal clapper into
A song of clanging monotony.
Falling leaves and swaying branches swirl
Through air and night, creating a netherworld
Where light has not the source of warmth, only reflection.
From the earth spring suddenly two figures
and the dying wind
And lifting shadows barely carry the warning
Of the chapel clock on the hour of twelve.

Charlsie Griffin

HOMEcoming

"No, Mary Alice, you can't go to Wanda Sue's house today. You were over there just last Saturday. What do you want to be going over there all the time for? What would your daddy say? I've told you a million times, you must be careful how you pick your little friends. Why, Wanda Sue's daddy doesn't even own their home. They're just mill people. You can be nice to her without going over there all the time."

Mary Alice pouted. Aunt Lucretia swung the broom over the long plank porch with furious zeal, although Rosa Lee, the girl who cleaned on Saturday, had swept earlier in the morning. Mary Alice could see particles of dust floating in the sunshine like a mirage.

"Don't you stick your lip out at me, young lady. You know I'm right. And besides, your daddy likes for you to be at home when he comes in for the weekend. You know he always brings you something from Atlanta."

"My daddy don't care what I do," Mary Alice flung back at her aunt. "He said as long as I was nice and acted like a lady, I would please him. I don't see how going over to Wanda Sue's isn't being nice."

"You heard what I said." Aunt Lucretia's lips pursed together in a thin line, and she waited for the full effect of her look to register with Mary Alice. "You go along to the barn and see if George is through cleaning up out there. Tell him he better hurry if he and Rosa Lee want to ride to town with your uncle." Mary Alice didn't move from her chair.

A man turned into the driveway. Aunt Lucretia propped the broom on the porch column and shaded her eyes with her hand as she watched the figure approach. "Jule," she whispered hoarsely, "Jule! Mary Alice, run get your uncle Eugene!" Mary Alice didn't move. "Get!" Aunt Lucretia shouted. Mary Alice fled.

The man approached, shuffling, walking on the cuffs of his faded, too-long blue jeans. He was bald. His eyes were light blue, faded in his tan face. A duffle bag was slung over his right shoulder. His left arm swung from his side at a peculiar angle, as if it had been sewn to his shoulder with a needle and thread.

A dog trotted at the man's heels. It was a German shepherd, not more than a pup, but already full size and vicious looking. It was tan with black markings, and its eyes were outlined in black, like those of a woman who had smeared too much black eyeliner around her eyes.

The man reached the steps. "You didn't let me know. . ." Lucretia's voice rose. "You didn't let us hear a word from you. Not a word when father and mother died. We thought maybe you had taken a little Korean bride for a while and just stayed over there. Is that what you did? Whatever possessed you to stay away all these years?"

The man set his duffle bag on the steps. He made a humming sound

in his throat, but he did not answer the woman.

"The last time we tried to contact you was when mother died in fifty-five." Lucretia looked away. "She kept asking for you. The cancer affected her mind. She was obsessed with the idea of doing her housework. She would stand at the ironing board trying to iron one of your old shirts with a cold iron, mumbling to you as if you were in the next room."

Mary Alice, followed by her uncle, appeared around the corner of the house. Eugene extended his hand and clasped the other man on the shoulder. Finally the man spoke. "The pup didn't have any place to go, so I brought him home. He slows me down too much." No one could think of a reply.

"Dinner is almost ready, Lucretia said. "Take your bag up to your room." Mary Alice started to follow, but her aunt held her back.

The man climbed the stairs slowly, feeling the rough, unfinished wood slide under the palm of his hand. Everything about the room seemed stale and unused, reminiscent of another time. Nothing had been moved. He lit a cigarette and picked up a picture of a handsome young man in uniform. Sitting down, he studied it carefully, squinting slightly. The photographer had added color too vividly, almost grossly; the man's hair, already thinning, was too yellow, and his eyes were too blue. The mustache was neat but too dark for the blond face. He remembered the day the picture had been made. . .

He had just come home from Maxwell Field Air Base in Alabama. He had grown a mustache for the homecoming. Most of the family had complimented his distinguished appearance, but Lucretia was a little disapproving. Her little girl had loved the novelty of his new look, so she had said nothing.

He was pacing the floor, smoking, waiting for his wife to come home from work. He was telling himself that his nervousness at seeing her again was foolish. His mother knocked, and without waiting for an answer, entered the bedroom he shared with his wife. "Jule," she had said, almost commanded, "get her away from here as soon as you can. Get her an apartment, a house, anything. She's not our kind, you've always known that. She will never be content here. You will have to make her another, different kind of life. Your dad will not like it, but move her."

He had received a letter from his wife the first week back at the base. Without reading it through, he knew that she had left. She had not moved to a house, or an apartment, but she had left him. He went home two times after that. Each time he returned to Maxwell Field he received letters from his sister—blundering attempts at sympathy, and short, terse advice on avoiding the pitfalls of whiskey and women. He did not bother to go home when the war was over. . .

The man imagined that he could feel the cool grey linoleum rug through the soles of his shoes. He wanted to pull his shoes off and rest his feet on its coolness. "Christ," he muttered, "traveling sure does wear a person out."

Especially with that pup." He knew that he should never have brought it along. But that old man had needed help; he had been embarrassed that he could not pay him more. It had seemed logical for him to say that he wanted the dog. The pup soon grew too big to carry, and he had to buy a rope to lead him; otherwise, he would not have lasted two minutes on the highway. He had made him a collar out of his belt. Sometimes it had seemed to him that he was leading the old man along the highway, instead of the dog.

The man could feel his jeans droop below his stomach as he got up and went to the window. He lit another cigarette and looked out, past the orchard to the mountains. When he was young, he imagined them to be tall and far away, hovering over something that he could neither grasp nor hold. He was a man before he accepted the fact that there was nothing vast or promising about the mountains; they were just foothills, not far away, and he had climbed the tallest one at least fifteen times.

He looked down into the yard, where Mary Alice was making futile attempts to befriend the dog. He knew without asking that she was Robert's child. She looked just like him; she could not have been begotten by anyone else. He closed his eyes. "You next, Robert, you next. But I can't think about you now. I'm tired, and I have come a long way."

Lucretia called him to dinner.

II

Uncle Eugene stifled a belch and rose from the table. Mary Alice watched him carry a chair into the den and turn it upside down. He stretched out on the floor, with a pillow between his head and the chair back. Almost immediately he was snoring. Uncle Eugene could fling the dining room chairs around as he pleased, but lying on one of Aunt Lucretia's carefully made beds in the middle of the day was an act he had never considered. It ranked in the category with inviting Martin Luther King Junior over for dinner. It just wasn't done.

Mary Alice coaxed her uncle Jule into the yard, knowing that coaxing was not really necessary. In the ten days the man had been home, he and Mary Alice had established the habit of walking after the noon meal. They always went to Mary Alice's special places—the swimming hole that was really just deep enough for wading, and the gully where Mary Alice had found the dead calf. Sometimes they walked all the way to the edge of the farm, where a stream trickled under the highway through a small tunnel that was large enough for Mary Alice to crawl through.

Mary Alice was impatient with her uncle's slow pace and jerked at his arm. The dog snarled and bared his teeth. The man gave it a hard kick.

Lucretia watched out the window until the two figures had disappeared from her vision. "He's beginning to feel settled," she told herself. "He is taking an interest in the farm. He will be all right when he starts to take an interest in things."

As they walked through the pasture, the man noticed that Mary Alice was careful, as usual, to walk near the fence, watching the cows closely, even though they were grazing at the other end of the pasture, unmindful of the intruders. Mary Alice admitted that she was afraid of cows. "Old Juanita hooked me. I was sitting on the fence, and she hooked me with her horn. Right in the belly." She pulled up her tee shirt and showed him a small white scar on her stomach. "She hooked me with only one horn, and it didn't hurt too much." She looked pleased. "But daddy came home in the middle of the week, and he took his gun and shot Juanita. Boy, was Uncle Eugene mad. She was his best milk cow." The man put his hand on the girl's light head.

"Aunt Lucretia and I got into trouble because I was on the fence, not acting like a lady. Mary Alice looked up at her uncle. "I did something awful mean today. I put sand in Bowser's food when I fed him this morning. To get back at him for being so mean to me. Why do you call him Bowser? That's a common name for a dog like him."

"Bowser is a common dog," the man answered.

"I felt bad later," Mary Alice said. "But not like I feel sometimes when it seems like I've done something wrong, but I don't know what it is. One time I told Aunt Lucretia how I felt, and she said I would feel better if I would confess what I'd done. But I couldn't think of anything."

The man's hand fluttered over the girl's head, then fell to his side. "I'm sorry I wasn't ever here," he said. "I failed you, too, and I didn't even know you."

The next morning the man didn't come to breakfast when Lucretia called. Mary Alice ran to the barn, to the pasture, then around to the back of the house. The dog was tied to the banister of the back porch steps, whining and gnawing at the rope.

Aunt Lucretia labored down the high steps with a plate of food. She handed the plate to Mary Alice and untied the dog. "Don't just stand there," she ordered Mary Alice. "Feed him." Mary Alice filled the dog's dish and the two stood watching him eat.

Barbara Bridges

To a very painful professor

directions

are your way of moving

space between points

is accused of existing in crime

we're universally produced

to rhyme with everything

and everything has no crime

Michael D. Rigsby



PHOTOGRAPH

You are a man, in a picture, two months dead,
whose mouth is bent on smiling at one end.
Your cheeks are red and unbelievable.
Your hairline ebbs, a fuzzy zigzag, from an endless scalp.
They have propped you on a wooden stool, in technicolor,
to tell all the world you once existed.
You do not look as if you believe it.

Killed in the click of a camera, you die twice.
How different was the second shutter's closing,
I want to know. Your tie will never tell.
It lies limp, the tail of a dead rat, on your shirt.
Your flannel suit retains its grey silence, and glasses
resting on your nose reflect nothing.

You are caught in a rectangular lie.
To keep your memory alive they display this photograph
of you on top of a colored t.v. set where,
every night after six, you compete with juggling acts,
sharp-nosed comedians, and exalted dogs,
for their attention.

Anna Wooten

FAULKNER

He was a little man with a great talent
He walked in the sand at night among the pines.
Many people were not aware of his presence,
But now that he's gone
They keep finding his tracks in the sand among the pines.

Some say that the pines obscure the tracks,
And when the pines are gone
It will become clear to all
That a great man was there.

Ernest Blankenship

HAIKU

In the cool river
a black-whiskered catfish swims . . .
dusk comes silently

On a twig
the caterpillar spins his house;
a green and gold jewel

A speckled trout leaps
trailing golden drops of water . . .
sunset on the lake.

Sandra Russ

thoroughly aged

sterile minds
years behind
lost in time
regarding rhymes
of younger souls
as empty holes

Michael D. Rigsby

FRAGMENT OF A PAST

Scattered from room to room,
Broken colors of red, green and blue.
Stepped on. . .

Chewed. . .

Abandoned!

Pages of simple objects:

Yellow eyes, orange hands, purple dogs.

Tattered. . .

Torn. . .

Eliminated!

Overwhelming nature. . .

Gigantic, monstrous!

Bees sting. . .

Birds peck. . .

Bugs bite!

Warning off intruders—

Defending their world.

Of fantasy. . .

Varnished wood, sanded by years,
the top!

to reach

to climb

Miles

Speckled by flowers, bees, and birds;

Long

way

to settle

on the

bottom!

Feet dangle in mid-air. . .

Knees crouched, touching

Animals of talent,

Trained to be unique and respected.

Dancing elephants. . .

Balancing dogs. . .

COLLOQUIA ON CARDS

PROLEGOMENON

I'd rather be Snuffy Smith with an ace
in my pocket
than with tuxedoed hints according to Goren
play bridge and cheat legally.

If I pull one, it'll be head on—
not with finesse,
or dummies,
or tea'd tips
on spades
over hearts.

SECOND TIME AROUND

boy, just gimme one more life, I said,
this time with deuces wild and crazy 8's—
and I'll be a celestial dragonman who,
madly dispersing magenta,
would make returning fishermen
drop shrimp in shock
before the sun
at 2 A. M.

AT 6:30 A. M.

got up to let the cat out
and about that sky I gotta hand
it to you Lord
before that royal flush
a guy'd sure be an idiot
not to fold

Betty S. Cox

FOR BEING A FOOL

For being a fool

I saw the reflections
in a melancholy pool
empty chambers
of forsaken fertility.

For being a fool

I stared at a wall
and accepted mitigating visions
of downward spinning spirals
and felt myself drowning
in an abysmal swamp.

For being a fool

I held it a dream
only to wake to nothingness
and find myself alone
in crowded Asphodel.

Agnes S. Stewart

THE BLAST

Brolly on the burning sands.
Parasol over Bikini.
Quantum, Bohl, Octet and Rutherford!
Free fall hell from a silvery devil
Land, air or water burst,
Take your choice.

White hot fire circling, climbing
graceful dust
Feel the gentle rain from hell. . .
disintegration
ionization
chain reaction

Barren trees stretch dead fingers
Wheat fields dance no more. . .
burnt red sun
Burlesque of life,
windswept
Hellish laughter from the Specter

Charles Lineberger

if this mess in america was done on purpose, just wait
until we have an accident.

Michael D. Rigsby

ONCE UPON HIS TIME

I can think again now—
in the dull heat of a long evening
when visions of the flesh and
painted dreams have all subsided.

Something like a vacuum in the mind,
something that lingers when the
tangible dissolves.

(Oh sometimes I regret that I could not
have written a better ending.
As clean as the first smile—
but time has its own way of making
the consequences ineffectual.)

Often I can see your face in sheer memory,
the clear incredible eyes,
our voices jammed with unnecessary words—
Time removes it all.

All but the sometimes void of early hours
not love, but a kind of need for laughter.

Lillian Wilson

THREE STEPS UP, AND DOWN

Beginning in disorder, crawling in the dust
measuring blades of grass with body count
which gives a sense of pride
And causes a worm to take stock
and look for a higher stalk to climb.
from which his vision is extended.
Once looking on the world from such a height
climbing then becomes a duty
From which recoiling could cause to tumble in the dust again,
and lie forever mute and dumb.

The beast arises and stands on two legs
while using the other two to beat his chest
in defiance and in the celebration of his feat.
He moves about proudly and scorns each one for doing
what he has done.

Beastliness leaves his body and enters his mind.
And from its inward seat of control flows out again.
He walks about and yells disorder, frightening all.
Order must be established.
Set up rules to follow and make all conform
Each must eat the way he eats and what
or be thrust out until he has learned to curb his appetite
and use good manners.
He must worship according to the way prescribed or not at all
Recreate and procreate according to a pattern
'Tis certain that if he doesn't learn, He'd better.

What's the matter with those slothful dullards who won't do their duty?
Make them toe the line or put them in a prison
Where they can't hurt or hinder
The development of our society.

The world will crumble and fall to dust
If our cause is neglected
So, join us. Be a brother,
But you must be like us.

When conformity is the order and life is run by rules
One sturdy brother, rebellious
Looks out upon the fools
And says "I'm one of them—would that I were not"
How far can one go in the order as it is?
The atmosphere is arid
And what I see on either side or up ahead
Is less inviting than what I see below, by far.

A step downward might be advancement
If I don't step too far.
On this plane he breathed more freely
Of the air that gave him vigor
So he took another step
And filled his lungs with invigorating air.
He stretched his arms and beat his chest
And pulled his hair to the dismay of these looking down upon him.

ALONE

Companionship is enjoyable and relaxing,
but solitude, for me, yields the
greater benefits.

Both states of being have advantages; however,
solitude carries an influence which will never dis-
appear. Companionship, depending on given cir-
cumstances, may or may not be terminal, while
solitude

is
infinite.

I understand solitude.

I know and crave the feeling that would
desire the absence of man

—I prefer solitude found in nature,
the blessing of uninterrupted
thoughts,
the unerring wisdom of animal life,
the ancient knowledge of the
earth's living room furniture
and fixtures,
and, finally,
climatically,
the peace within my
own soul.

This grand finale

can never be taken from me.

It comes from deep, pure thoughts
conceived only when nature drowns me in her purity,

purity which flushes out the impurities I acquire from my
own base thoughts or from society.

The peace then takes its place
within my soul waiting to be
joined by friend Eternity.

Both

begin that precious journey
down the passageway of time,
becoming princes within me.

Soitude

is my true friend, and he gains my love
for the free gifts he bestows upon me.

I love being alone.

Mary Jo Byrd

But he jumped for joy and said "I'm free"
They gave him pity, but that was all,
And in contempt when he saw them digging a hole in the sand to place
A box and cover up
He said "you too return to dust and so will I
But I have joy while I live
And all you do is die"

Ernest Blankenship

YOU

You lighten up my way
With your smile.
You teach me forms of kindness
With your eyes.
You make me understand life
With your voice.
You deeply reach my heart
With your touch.

AND

You fill my lonely life
With your love!

Vickie Gordon

ADOLESCENT

I see myself
In all your faces.
The agonies I once thought
Were mine alone
Are shared by you.
If I had only known
Before I was 27.

Barbara Rhodes

HAIKU

Through a breath of fog,
Vision. The crystal-shined lake
Gives light back to light.

Through the still, stark night
A loon's cry
Echoes loneliness.

On an ice strung branch
A blackbird lifts its wings
And contemplates. Spring!

In the barren field
Brittle, brown cottonstalks,
Rooted in nakedness.

Barbara Bridges

god is this famous mathematician who can come up with a
total while the rest of us can just keep adding one more to
it.

Michael D. Rigsby

CHOEPHORI

Riding drops arrive
to liquefy the
already-nearly-liquid orb,
injecting intravenously
the turning ball.

The ball so swiftly turns
that Aries' spill becomes Aquila's drops,
and Tunis' heavy air,
Haiti's breeze.

we turn and turn—and so our
Illinois tears become
the Chinese children's rain;
rickshaws ride where Gary's lamps
made asphalt shine

In time the intravenous work is done
through predetermined roll.
We spin so often—and so long—
till holding worldmates' sorrow in our souls,
their laughter on our skin,

we move to ecumenical absorption

and beat politicians to love.

Betty S. Cox

FIVE CENT CIGARS

Five cent cigars
pushed by the frigid indian
hung up on wood
no longer bleed.
The street corner
holds the fading indian
whose stealthy smile has been imprisoned eternally
with a raised finger of Peace
Protesting man's inhumanity to man
higher taxation for cuspidors
and further insubordination
against the minority
of lost arrowheads
which haven't yet been sold as nickel souvenirs.

Cigars are 10c now.

Agnes S. Stewart

JESUS

lizard man
can't you find some shade
your skin is cracking
you'll die from fasting
don't you thirst a little
for the water i've made

oh lizard man
can't you rest a while
must you travel on
won't you wait for us
we'll gladly follow
in the evening dust

hey lizard man
would you like my wife
she's young and beautiful
full of life
she's an offering
a gift
won't you please receive
must you die a martyr
in what you believe

lizard man
my patience wears thin
and i'll ask you but once again
my house is cool
you need not thirst
i'll gladly give
all i have on earth
if you'll but stop
and share our mirth

lizard man
since you won't stay
i'll watch you die
this very day
from this sheath
i'll draw my knife
and take from you
this holy life
and in repentance
i'll burn your bones
in an offering
to the life i've slain

THE BEST END OF A BARGAIN

Sister stepped through the wide doorway and drew her breath in sharply. There was something about the way a barn smelled that always made her do that. Maybe it was the pungent odor of sweating horses just unharnessed or the stale scent of dried manure piled beside stall doors. Outside a breeze was stirring, but in here the warm heavy air scarcely moved. "Hello," she called, but no one answered. That was good, she wanted to be alone. Among the stalls filled with horses she could forget all the problems that came with being twelve years old. For hours she would sit on a nail keg with her thin, serious face propped in her hands and listen to the animals munch their hay. Sometimes Polly would join her mewing and rub against her legs. Uncle R. J. said Polly was the best mouser he had ever seen and that she was worth her weight in gold. Rats could do a lot of damage in a barn, especially to grain.

Her Uncle R. J. was a trader of sorts. He was always coming back from some sale with a truck-load of horses and mules he'd got at a bargain. Most of them were old, worn-out plugs fit only for the processing plant. Occasionally he would come across a really fine animal. He usually made money on these and prided himself with being a shrewd dealer. Sister looked forward to the new arrivals. She loved horses and made friends with them easily.

Now she walked up and down the dimly lit aisle peering into each stall. The occupants nickered softly and thrust out their noses for lumps of sugar and caresses. From the last stall came a small whinny and she ran to look. Her breath caught in her throat. Through a crack in the wall, sunlight poured over a tiny buckskin pony. It tossed its silky white mane at her and whinnied again. Timidly she reached out to touch the soft nose and the pony nuzzled her hand. Encouraged by this friendliness, she moved inside the stall and began to stroke the pony's neck. It felt smooth and warm under her finger-tips.

"Want to take her out, Sister?"

she turned and looked into her uncle's blue eyes. "Do you think I could?"

"Why sure," he said. "She's as gentle as a spring lamb. Wait here and I'll get her cart."

From under the barn shed he pulled a red pony cart with a brown leather seat. The big rubber wheely crunched across the gravel as he maneuvered it into place behind the pony.

"Ain't this a dandy?" he said, rubbing a smudge from one of the shafts. "Hold her steady now. I'll have this hitched up quicker than Polly can blink an eye."

"What's her name, Uncle R.J.?"

"Well, I don't rightly know that she's got a name. Have you got one in mind?"

Sister thought about the sunlight falling across the pony as she stood in the stall. "I'd like to call her Sunny "

"Then Sunny it is," he laughed.

The pony stood quietly as he placed the harness on her back and began to buckle it. The leather was old and stiff and it creaked as he worked with it. "Blasted thing's about to fall apart," he muttered. "Hand me that bridle, Sister." He breathed on the bits to warm them. "Never could stand to put cold metal in a horse's mouth." Sister smiled to herself. Uncle R. J. wasn't as gruff as he let on to be.

"There, she's ready to go. Now remember to hold those reins steady and don't let her get too fast with you."

"I'll be careful," Sister promised and scrambled onto the seat. The leather felt cool against her bare legs. She picked up the reins and the cart moved forward. The ground was still rough from the winter freezes and the cart bounced along wildly. When they reached the road, Sister loosened the reins and the pony began to trot, picking up speed with each stride. Her little hooves pounded the pavement, never breaking their rhythm. The cart skimmed along as she moved ahead effortlessly. Houses, fence posts, and trees rolled by. The wind whistled around Sister's head lifting her long auburn braids. Her heart was pounding, but she wasn't afraid. Farmers stopped their hoeing to turn and stare after the cart as it passed. She waved to them gaily.

R. J. watched the small intent figure sitting erect on the seat and shook his gray head. Such a little bit of a thing and no mother to look after her. No wonder she spent so much time sitting in that barn talking to the horses and Polly.

"Can't she trot?" He smiled broadly as Sister led the pony back into the barn.

"Sure can," she agreed.

"Yes sir. I don't believe I've ever seen one that could beat her. She was trained proper, that's for sure. Old Doc Martin knows how to do it." He looked at the girl's shining eyes and said gently, "You like her, don't you, Sister?"

She nodded and cradled the pony's blonde head in her arms. "She's the most wonderful pony in the whole world."

"Well, this pony just might be for sale." He leaned back against a post, folded his arms across his chest, and cocked an eyebrow at her. "Would you be interested?"

"I don't have any money," Sister said miserably. "And even if I did, where would I keep her?"

"Who said anything about money?" he asked crossly. Then he laughed.

lines creased deeply in his brown face. "We might be able to work out a trade."

"What kind of trade, Uncle R. J.?"

He looked around the barn. "There's a lot of work to do around here and I could sure use some help. I'd be willing to give you the pony if you'd give me a hand with some of these chores."

"But I still don't have anywhere to keep her."

"Sure you do. She can stay here and you can be responsible for taking care of her. That includes feeding her and cleaning the stall. Agreed?" Sister nodded and then hugged him.

"Oh go on with you now," he said gruffly. "No use to get all mushy about it. Besides, what's a grown man going to do with a pony? She's too little to ride. I'll be getting the best end of the bargain."

Sister pushed a bale of hay from the loft and watched it shatter on the concrete floor below. After the smelly stalls were mucked out, she would scatter the fresh hay inside them. Sunny's stall always got an extra half a bale. After all, she was special. For the past few months, Sister had done this every morning. It was hard work, but she didn't mind. After the cleaning was finished, she could hitch Sunny to the cart and take long rides through the meadows surrounding the barn. This was her favorite time of day when the grass was still wet with dew and the air clear and fresh. The squeaking cart wheels and thudding hooves were the only sounds. Across small hills, the cart would go bouncing; Sunny's head bobbing up and down with the rhythm of her trot. She loved to watch the pony's movements. It gave her a good feeling.

Sister began to notice that Sunny wasn't trotting as smoothly as she once had. In the mornings, she seemed reluctant to leave her stall and be hitched to the cart. R. J. noticed it too. One afternoon, he led the pony from her stall and examined each hoof closely. Then he felt of her legs carefully.

"There seems to be some swelling. Maybe you'd better leave off the cart rides for awhile." He handed sister a bottle of strong-smelling liquid. "Try rubbing this lineament over her legs every day. Maybe that will help."

The pony's legs grew worse. She could barely hobble into the pasture to graze with the other horses. Then she would stand with her legs spread apart and her head hung down. Sister tried to tempt her with handfuls of grass and sweet clover, but she only nibbled at them.

R. J. buried his hands in the pockets of his faded jeans and watched as the pony slowly followed Sister back into the barn. He knew what was wrong. He'd seen it happen to ponies too many times. Their legs were just too slender to support their weight and the hooves would begin to spread out. Nothing could be done for it. He wiped the back of his hand across his perspiring face. How could he tell Sister?

Her eyes were frightened and red from crying. "Sunny will be all right won't she, Uncle R. J.? I'll rub her legs with lineament everyday and bring



all her food to her."

R. J. forced a smile. "She'll get better." He cupped his hand under Sister's trembling chin. "Now don't fret yourself anymore. It's getting late. You'd best go on home before your dad starts to worry."

Sister turned to stroke the pony's nose and scratch between her ears. "You'll be well soon, Uncle R. J. said so. Then we can take cart rides just like we use to." She smiled at him. "I feel better now."

R. J. waited until Sister was out of sight before going into the house. In a few minutes he returned carrying a rifle. The pony nickered softly as he walked inside the stall and snapped a lead rope to her halter. Dusk had come and he led her through the gathering dark to the far end of the pasture. They stopped in a clump of white birch. He hadn't been able to tell Sister the truth.

"Why did I ever make such a fool deal?" he thought bitterly. But there was no use in thinking about that now. He had to do this for the pony's sake. For a few moments he stood running his hands through the soft mane. Then he walked away, turned, and aimed the gun between the pony's brown eyes. He hesitated for an instant and pulled the trigger.

Sandra Mains Russ



Wind torn
tree sprouts
new limbs
toward gold sun

Field flowers
grow among
crevices
of abandoned
rock quarries

grass slips
from beneath
asphalt covers

Mother Nature
licks her
wounds.

Carolyn Santanella

We would like to express our appreication to the
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